

ABOUT BOOKS

Last Chain on Billie, How One Extraordinary Elephant Escaped the Big Top
By Carol Bradley
Published 2014 by St. Martin's Press,
New York, NY
\$25.99 hardcover

Elephants, writes Dame Daphne Sheldrick in the foreword to *Last Chain on Billie*, are the emotional counterparts to humans, “with the same strong sense of family, and of death, and with friendships that span a lifetime ...” Sheldrick should know. She’s helped rehabilitate more than 170 elephant orphans in Kenya’s Tsavo National Park.

Unfortunately, humans have a tendency to treat these amazing giants with uncommon cruelty, a history chronicled by Great Falls author Carol Bradley in her poignant new book. The elephant whose life she follows was born and captured somewhere in India, and first surfaced in America in 1966 at age four during an era when pachyderms were still a novelty.

After spending six years in a small zoo in Massachusetts, she was sold to Chicago-area millionaire John Cuneo Jr. and remained his possession for more than three decades, learning and performing the tricks that made elephants valuable on the circus circuit. As a member of the Hawthorne Five, Billie entertained audiences across the U.S., and in Hawaii and Japan with an array of complex maneuvers: she could balance on a tub, stand on one leg, or sit on her hind legs, with a human perched on her forehead.

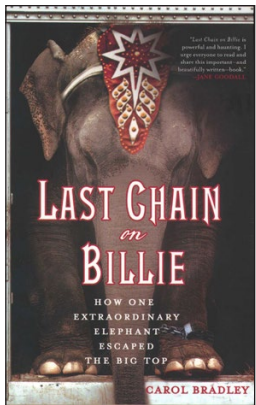
None of the tricks that elephants performed in the ring “were natural movements,” notes Bradley. And the cost of stardom was often steep: in addition to suffering long-term physical ailments, elephants were usually kept in chains and controlled with bullhooks, “instruments shaped like fireplace poker with a sharp, steel-tipped spike and hook,” used to poke and prod the animals’ most sensitive extremities.

Bradley intersperses the story of Billie’s lengthy circus bondage with a history of the animals in the U.S., dating back to 1796 through the government’s eventual ban on importing endangered species.

Eventually, Billie is rescued from her bleak home – a barn in Illinois, where she spent 10 years chained in a stall – and set free at a sanctuary for performing elephants in Tennessee. As the elephant “with a reputation for being difficult,” gradually eases into her new life she blossoms into an animal “capable of utter delight.”

Bradley’s book is a thorough, compelling and well-crafted reminder that humans aren’t the only animals on Earth endowed with brains, emotions and sensitivity. “Powerful and haunting,” writes Jane Goodall.

– Kristi Niemeyer



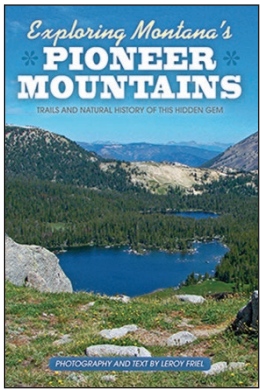
Exploring Montana’s Pioneer Mountains: Trails and Natural History of This Hidden Gem
By Leroy Friel
Published by the author and distributed in
2014 by Farcountry Press, Helena, MT
\$21.95 softcover

Montana’s status as a travel destination has left few trails unexplored. However, Leroy Friel’s new guidebook, *Exploring Montana’s Pioneer Mountains*, takes readers to the little-known mountain range in southwest Montana.

A retired Montana Tech engineering professor, Friel has hiked, fished and hunted the Pioneer Mountains for 35 years. His passion for finding secluded locations has led him throughout the 2,000-square-mile range.

Covering 89 lakes and many trails, the book is the only one of its kind that provides tips for hikers, climbers, fishermen, and wildflower and wild-life enthusiasts in the Pioneers. Its 33 maps guide readers to various points of interest on both the east and west sides of the range, while 120 photographs capture views of lakes, mountains, flora, fauna, and historical sites.

Friel’s excitement about spending time in this unspoiled wilderness is contagious, and his insights entice readers to seek their own adventures in the Pioneers – a quiet getaway that’s an easy drive from Butte, Bozeman, Helena, and Missoula.

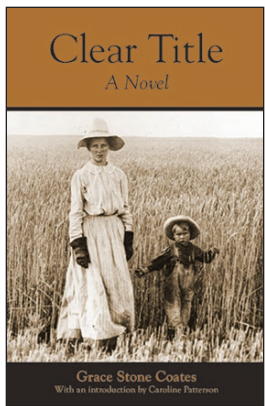


Clear Title: A Novel
By Grace Stone Coates
Published September 2014 by Drumlummon Institute, Helena, MT
\$16.95 softcover

With the publication of *Clear Title: A Novel*, Drumlummon Institute releases the last remaining unpublished work by renowned Montana novelist, poet and editor Grace Stone Coates.

In 1931, Alfred A. Knopf published the author’s first novel, *Black Cherries*, made up of a series of linked stories. In her introduction to the 2003 reprint of *Black Cherries*, Mary Clearman Blew wrote that Coates wasn’t entirely satisfied with the novel, noting that perhaps “a more coherent book would have been a more revealing book.”

Clear Title, written soon after the publication of *Black Cherries*, may be that more coherent book – it certainly tells a more revealing story. When Coates submitted this second novel to Knopf, in the midst of the Great Depression, the publisher rejected it, although he praised its “beautiful writing.”



Just as *Black Cherries* reveals, in Blew’s words, a “family caught in a web of tension so acute that it binds them inexorably even as it separates them,” *Clear Title* tells the story of the same family, but more directly, revealing the secrets, lies and betrayals that created that painful web.

In her introduction to *Clear Title*, Caroline Patterson – editor of the award-winning anthology, *Montana Women Writers: A Geography of the Heart* — writes, “*Clear Title* is a frank exploration of power in marriage: the moral, sexual, intellectual, and legal power between a husband and a wife By the end of the book, the power in the family has shifted. Instead of a father ruling the roost, we see three sisters, traveling as equals, released ... from the rigidity and anger of the past.”

The Kansas-born Coates (1881-1976) spent most of her life in Montana’s Musselshell Valley. In addition to *Black Cherries*, she published two collections of poetry. This powerful, heartbreaking novel marks the author’s last remaining major work to make its way into print.

HomeFarm
By Josh Slotnick
Published 2014 by FootHills Publishing,
Kanona NY
\$16 softcover

“A shaggy baggy regular guy” tries to bargain for a bag of broccoli at the farmers’ market, on a day of triple-digit temperatures – a day so hot that the irrigation pipes farmer/poet Josh Slotnick carries on his shoulders that evening “burn through my shirt.”

“The broccoli in the bag, not as beautiful as it could be
but respectable
the silhouetted mountains are in it
your farm childhood
the sweat in my eyes, the burn on my shoulder
the relentless worry for water
It’s all there, in a sack.”

The same way the relentless work of growing food lives in this book of gritty, nourishing poems.

Much of the year, Slotnick labors around the clock: by day at the Garden City Harvest/University of Montana PEAS farm, and mornings and evenings at his own place, with his wife and three kids (the oldest gone now, into his own life).

Like that other farmer/poet Wendell Berry, the land feeds the poems and the poems serve the land. But it’s hardly a tranquil relationship. Turkeys are guillotined, pigs shot, an entire crop of pumpkins almost lost to frost. And always the vagaries of weather and water – too much or too little – and ceaseless effort “when there was no effort left to give.”

The cycle of “making and letting go” reminds Slotnick of the elaborate sand mandalas that Tibetan monks create, then wash away in the river. His children, he sees, are part of this cycle, as is the garden’s “crazy diversity” tilled to “flat sameness” each fall. Something deep-rooted and tender grows from such an intimate relationship to the Earth, something as simple, perhaps, as the closing lines of the “Farm Rap”: “You are what you do every day.”

Author David James Duncan describes Slotnick’s poems as “intimate, sassy, effortlessly knowledgeable, bluesy in their brokenness” and praises HomeFarm as “one of the most responsible books of poetry I’ve ever read.”

– Kristi Niemeyer



Gatherings: Friends and Recipes from Montana’s Mustang Kitchen
By Carole Sullivan
Published 2014 by Carole Sullivan,
Livingston, MT
\$29.95 hardcover

In the early 1990s, Carole Sullivan responded to an invitation to work in the kitchen of the newly renovated Livingston Bar and Grille, under the ownership of well-known artist and local resident Russell Chatham.

After six months, she realized that she was destined to own her own business. “Real food for real people” is what Sullivan set out to produce when she opened her catering business. Eventually, she and her husband expanded the business to include a cozy restaurant named the Mustang.

Her book includes a spectacular collection of recipes from the restaurant, as well as menus from her catering business, including themed picnics, dinners, and holiday affairs featuring fresh ingredients, skillfully but simply prepared.

Her Turkey Chile Verde is always on the menu at Michael Keaton’s annual Fourth of July picnic, the author reports. And her longtime friends, Jeff and Susan Bridges, depend on her to prepare a traditional Thanksgiving meal for their family, featuring a pancetta-sage stuffed boneless turkey.

Sullivan has cooked for President Obama and Martha Stewart, but says it’s her regular restaurant clientele that makes the daily effort “all worthwhile.”

Clear and simple instructions for preparations of the recipes are included, and Lynn Donaldson’s beautiful photography fashionably showcases the end products, as well as scenic settings for the al fresco meals.

Sullivan says her purpose in writing this book was “to make meal-planning easier by putting these recipes together into ‘gatherings’ so that you can create your own events with the people you love.” She has surely succeeded in doing just so!

Sullivan lives in Livingston with her husband and son. The restaurant is located on West Lewis Street, in a little red house.

– Judy Shafter



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Please send book proposals to: Acquisitions, PO Box 5630, Helena, MT 59604. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or your materials will not be returned, and do not send original art or photographs. For more information, visit www.farcountrypress.com.

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